



Above: *The Green Dress*, 2018, oil on canvas, 32" x 48"

Cover Panel: *One, Two, Three*, 2018, oil on canvas, 30" x 60"



Surrender, 2018, oil on canvas, 40" x 94"

Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 40th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,903 artists in 316 visual art exhibitions, 128 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 30 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 646 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, the New York Times, ArtForum, and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Women & Their Work reaches over 650 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



women and
their work

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MEG AUBREY

SURFACE



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

AUGUST 4 - SEPTEMBER 6, 2018

AUSTIN, TEXAS

SURFACE

In the mid-twentieth century, British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott observed:

“It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation.”⁷¹ Meg Aubrey’s paintings carefully reflect all the specifics of suburban life, especially its insistence on order and conformity. Aubrey’s landscapes repeat images of mailboxes, empty lawns, carefully groomed trees, and recycling bins to represent the generic nature of suburbia, its constrained choices expressed by the bright but limited colors of her palette.

Aubrey’s *Play* series, in which she arranges and paints tableaux of plastic dollhouse furniture, similarly repeats generic images. These serializations, like Wayne Thiebaud’s paintings of candy, ice cream cones, and people at leisure, explore a lifestyle that can be empty and plastic, while Aubrey’s bright beguiling colors highlight the appeal of these privileged lives.

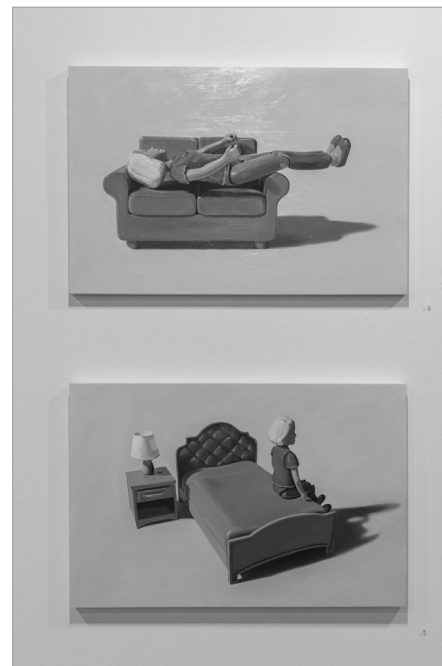
The tension between this appealing surface and the anxious lives it depicts draws me into the paintings; I am at once attracted to and repelled by these images. Winnicott writes, “In a tantalizing way many individuals have experienced just enough of creative living to recognize that for most of their time they are living uncreatively, as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine.” The machine of consumer culture usurps the imagination, but its replications of genuine culture become

place markers for what has been lost. This exiled creative consciousness, which Winnicott terms the “true self,” haunts Aubrey’s paintings.

In Yoko Ono’s installation, *Half-a-Room*, the furniture and other objects have been sawn in half and painted white, causing the viewer to wonder about the half-a-person who might live there. In Aubrey’s *Play* series, it is a plastic self that haunts the paintings. Reflecting consumer culture, this plastic self is “poseable” and compliant. Winnicott notes, “Compliance carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth living.” This existential malaise also plagues the figures in Aubrey’s suburban landscapes. Like the plastic doll and furniture in the *Play* series, they are posed for effect, alienated from one another and from their true selves.

In *One, Two, Three*, three soccer moms watch a game that takes place outside the frame of the painting. The absence of children in the painting empties the soccer-mom role of meaning; it becomes not only a stereotype but also a façade. The real action goes on in the brightly colored backs of the women’s fold-up chairs, each a different color, the fabric assuming varied shapes, vibrant with light and shadow. Their backs to the viewer, the women are faceless, defined by the purses that hang from their chairs. Contrasting with the straight white lines of the soccer pitch, a long ragged shadow underpins the chairs, connecting the women who seem otherwise cut off from each other and from the emotional life the shadow might represent.

In and Out #2 bridges Aubrey’s *Suburban* and *Play* series, fusing a streetscape with an interior. The painting shows dollhouse furniture arranged on a windowsill with a view of the street beyond. Two chairs face one another, suggesting the possibility of conversation. An ottoman and flowers set between the chairs are bubblegum pink, but no one sits here to enjoy them, and outside, the empty sidewalks, driveways, lawns, and brick mailboxes form a sterile and monotonous pattern. Even the grass, the only living thing represented, appears flat and lifeless, while the plastic flowers are vibrant, sparkling with light, their cast shadow resembling a porcupine. Placed between the chairs, the flowers could be the subject of the absent conversation, signifying the allure of the artificial, and revealing how consumer culture steals attention from the natural world.



Relax #1 and Relax #2, 2018,
oil on panel, 20" x 30" each

Livingroom #2 displays another tableau of dollhouse furniture, its small scale made apparent by the width of the floorboards and height of the molding. The arrangement feels like a miniature stage set, highlighting the self-conscious nature of these paintings. Wondering who might live here, I remember the 1980's movie, *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*, which critiques women's roles in suburban culture, portraying the dangers posed to these women as they comply with what Sheila Heti describes as "the most womanly problem... to fit oneself into the smallest spaces in the hopes of being loved."² But *Livingroom #2* is uninhabited, either abandoned or waiting for the living to begin, an empty nest or a model home within a home.

Relax depicts a plastic doll lying prone on a loveseat. Able to bend only at the hips and knees, she holds out rigid arms, hands clenched in fists that suggest the anger and frustration of a woman told to "relax." Her yellow hair and beige skin glisten, but she has no agency. I'm aware that the doll has been posed and I imagine the hand of the artist arranging and rearranging the furniture, seeking order and meaning in a world that feels chaotic and confused. The unseen hand of the artist conjures political and corporate forces that intrude into our homes through traditional and social media, affecting and determining our choices. The loveseat should be a place of ease and connection, but the doll's posture betrays the dis-ease at the heart of these lives.

As in *In and Out #2*, Aubrey fuses two genres in *Surrender*. Here it is color field painting and the self-portrait. The artist sinks into a sea of vivid green that represents yet another lawn. Resigned, she surrenders



Livingroom #1, 2017, oil on panel, 20" x 30"

to suburbia. The cool drab tones of her clothing contrast with the warmth and intensity of the yellow-green surface that overwhelms her. But seen another way, the artist does not sink, but surfaces from a spring-green field of paint, connected to it by the narrow rim of her shadow. The prone figure is both overwhelmed soccer mom and working artist, who, by surrendering to suburban imagery, recreates herself as the subject of her own life, paints herself into being. In removing the sky from this composition, Aubrey not only heightens the pervasiveness of the suburban lawn, but also creates a space for herself as artist, a field of paint that is light-filled, transcendent.

Aubrey says, "the perfection of a lawn takes a lot of work and satisfies a need for order and comfort when lives are in disarray." She fondly remembers "the big yard when I grew up" and the dollhouse she wanted when she was fourteen, but these paintings are not nostalgic. Instead they

express a longing for play. Winnicott says, "It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self." Herein lies the attraction of Aubrey's *Play* series; the candy-colored toys set inside large empty interiors are markers, memorials for the forgotten promise of play, which Winnicott posits as the "foundation" of "cultural experience." Aubrey's paintings expose the half-a-life of suburban America and its "Disneyfication" of culture, where safety, order, and status symbols usurp play, and the true self waits in the shadows to be discovered.

Kim Aubrey, author, lives in Ontario, Canada

1. D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (1971; Reissued London: Routledge, 2005), 87. All Winnicott quotations are from this source.

2. Sheila Heti, *Motherhood* (Toronto: Knopf, 2018) 169.

Meg Aubrey

EDUCATION

M.F.A. Painting, Savannah College of Art and Design,
Atlanta, Georgia

B.F.A. Illustration, Rhode Island School of Design,
Providence, Rhode Island

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2018 *Surface, Women & Their Work*, Austin, Texas

2012 *Domiciled*, Whitespace Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia

2009 *Home Sweet Home*, Milliken Art Gallery,
Converse College, Spartanburg, South Carolina
I Just Live Here, ACA Gallery, Atlanta Georgia and Pei Ling
Chan Gallery, Savannah, Georgia
I Just Live Here, Gallery Stokes, Atlanta, Georgia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018 *Oso Bay Biennial XX: Realism Redux!*, Islander Gallery,
Corpus Christi, Texas
Emerging Artist Exhibition, Museum of Arts and Sciences,
Macon, Georgia
Sign of the Times, Weave Shed Gallery, Hambidge Residency,
Rabun Gap, Georgia

2017 *New Arrivals*, Cumberland Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee
Red Clay Survey, Huntsville Museum of Art,
Huntsville, Alabama
The Game Show, Lyndon House Arts Center, Athens, Georgia
American Dream, KSpace Contemporary, Corpus Christi, Texas
Tidal Shift Texas A&M University, Art Museum of South Texas,
Corpus Christi, Texas
Freedom of Expression, Cape Cod Museum of Art,
Dennis, Massachusetts
La Merienda, Islander Art Gallery, Corpus Christi, Texas
The Art of Healthy Living, Fulton County Arts Council,
Atlanta, Georgia
51st Annual National Drawing & Small Sculpture Show,
Del Mar College, Corpus Christi, Texas

2016 *The December Show*, Whitespace Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
The Imaginary Million, WonderRoot, Les Fai do-do,
Atlanta, Georgia
The Artist is in the Building, Islander Gallery,
Corpus Christi, Texas
Delta Sky Club, Atlanta International Airport, Atlanta, Georgia
Little Things!, Swan Coach House Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
Storytellers, Cumberland Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee
Art of Georgia Exhibition, Georgia Capitol Museum, Atlanta, Georgia
Small Works Exhibition, Lemonade Stand Gallery,
Key West, Florida
Where We Are Going, MINT Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia

Painting and Seeing, University of North Carolina Wilmington,
Wilmington, North Carolina

2015 *Last Exit*, Bakehouse Art Complex, Miami, Florida
A Sense of Place, Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art,
Augusta, Georgia
Landfall, Gutstein Gallery, Savannah, Georgia
The Raconteurs, Gallery Walk at Terminus, Atlanta, Georgia
Fantastical Minds, Gallery Walk at Terminus, Atlanta, Georgia
Selfie: A Contemporary Look at the Self Portrait,
Chastain Arts Center, Atlanta, Georgia

SCORE: Artists in Overtime, Museum of Contemporary Art,
Atlanta, Georgia
Community Supports Artists Project, WonderRoot,
Atlanta, Georgia

E-merge: Contemporary Atlanta Artists, Hartsfield Jackson Airport,
Atlanta, Georgia
The December Show, Whitespace Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia

2012 *A Sense of Place*, Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art,
Augusta, Georgia

2011 *Small Wonders*, Maryland Federation of Art Circle Gallery,
Annapolis, Maryland
Homebound, Fe Art Gallery, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Dog Days, Galley Walk at Terminus, Atlanta, Georgia
The Contemporary Figure, Swan Coach House Gallery,
Atlanta, Georgia
After the Suburbs, Kiang Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
Rising Movers & Shakers of the Georgia Art Scene, Museum of
Contemporary Art Georgia (MOCA – GA), Atlanta, Georgia

2010 *The December Show*, Whitespace Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
Small Works, Gutstein Gallery, Savannah, Georgia
The Price is Right, Swan Coach House Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
Unconventional Portraiture, Terminus, Atlanta, Georgia
Burb: Zones of Living, Manifest Gallery, Cincinnati, Ohio

2009 *The Ones to Watch*, Alan Avery Art Company, Atlanta, Georgia
Emerging Artists, Spruill Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
The Guard and the Vanguard, Bill Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
Contemporary Art for Modern Times, Johns Creek Arts Center,
Johns Creek, Georgia

2008 *Post-Petroleum*, Sheppard Fine Art Gallery at the
University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada
Wish You Were Here, Art in General, New York, New York
Sweet Fried, Defoor Centre, Atlanta, Georgia
On the Edge, Vaknin Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
Louvre Project, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia
Case Studies, Defoor Centre, Atlanta, Georgia